

# Does participation in a 4-H Club make a difference in a young person's life?

Research on the benefits of 4-H in children's lives has included:

- New York 4-H Club Study
- Studies of children involved in 4-H,
- A study of 4-H Club leaders, and
- Studies that compare 4-H youth with non-4-H youth.

# YES!

## New York 4-H Club Study [1]

This two-year study focused on understanding the difference 4-H Club participation makes in a young person's life and the ways in which 4-H Clubs influence and contribute to positive youth development in New York State. The results show that the process of youth development is positively influenced in multiple ways by 4-H Club membership and that young people who participate in 4-H Clubs do better in school, are more motivated to help others, and are developing skills in leadership, public speaking, self-esteem, communication and planning, and are making lasting friendships.

Additionally, the length of time a youth remains in 4-H was examined. Statistically significant differences were shown for youth who remain in 4-H for one year or more for the following assets and/or skills: leadership, conflict resolution, communication, self-confidence, ability to make healthy choices, knowledge of nutrition and food safety, and record keeping.

In addition, responses to the open-ended question at the end of the "Members Only" Survey (i.e., "What do you feel you have gained from being a 4-H Club member?") provided a wealth of rich data upon which to draw conclusions about the difference 4-H Club membership makes in a young person's life:

A strong majority of club members felt they had gained skills that would support them throughout their lives. The majority of club youth reported multiple gains in terms of public speaking, problem solving, goal setting, leadership skills, planning skills, self-confidence, citizenship, communication skills, academic gains, expanded horizons, organizational skills, respect for (and from) others, patience, tolerance, and "real-world" experience from hands-on projects.

The majority of youth reported that they had developed skills in leadership, public speaking, self-esteem, communication, and planning.

*I feel that the experience I've gained from being a 4-H member puts me "a notch above the rest." 4-H experiences such as public presentations and educational projects have given me an edge in school. Biology and English seem so much easier when you already know about pond life and how to deliver an oral presentation. My experiences with 4-H community service projects have encouraged my desire to help other people as well as my feelings of self-fulfillment. Most importantly, the leadership experiences that I have had through 4-H have helped me to become a more outgoing person, ready to take on all different sorts of responsibilities.*



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Additionally, many youth reported that 4-H Club membership had improved their school performance, their ability to make lasting friendships, and their desire to make a difference in their communities.

Most adults who participated in the study believed that the success of 4-H Club members was closely related to active participation and involvement in public demonstrations, community service projects, and county and state fairs. Others believed that the relationships developed in 4-H Clubs and long-term membership were the keys to positive outcomes for youth.

#### **Other Studies of 4-H Participants:**

A study of over 760 4-Hers in Pennsylvania indicated that youth who had county leadership experiences rated high on life skills, and even higher when they have more leadership experiences beyond the county level. [2]

A study of 400 youth involved in swine projects in Iowa showed that 4-H youth perceived that project participation had positive effects on the development of their life skills. [3]

A study of over 50 animal science project alumni in New Jersey reported that their 4-H experiences influenced the development of their life skills, particularly accepting responsibility. [4]

#### **A Study of 4-H leaders:**

In a survey of 566 4-H Club leaders in Wisconsin, researchers found that adult club leaders perceived significant benefits of 4-H involvement, both for children and their communities.

Benefits to youth: Psychological development, Social development, Intellectual development – *“Learning about caring, sharing, responsibility for our land, community and the people we live with helps youth become responsible adults.”*

Benefits to the community: Economic - Youth become viewed as assets; Civic - *“Youth service accomplishes activities that the community would have to use tax dollars for.”* [5]

#### **Comparing 4-Hers with non-4-H Youth**

The strongest test of the role of 4-H in the lives of youth is to compare 4-Hers to children who are not members of 4-H. Past studies have shown:

Youth who have participated in 4-H for more than a year are significantly better off than youth who did not participate in the program (study of 2,500 youth in Montana). [8]

Participation in 4-H has a positive influence on children's perceptions of their competence, coping, and life skills (study of 666 Ohio public school children). [6]

4-Hers rate themselves higher than non-4-H peers on working with groups, understanding self, communicating, making decisions, and leadership (study of over 300 4-H club members and over 500 non-4-H school children in Texas). [7]

Within 4-Hers, more involvement is associated with higher scores on communication, working with groups, and leadership. [7]

## Sources of Research Studies:

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[5] Source: Taylor-Powell, Ellen, Greg Hutchins, and Robyn Reed. 1997. Community Service: What 4-H Youth Groups do to make a Difference. University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension.

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[6] Miller, Jeffrey P. and Blannie F. Bowen. 1993. "Competency, Coping, and Contributory Life Skills Development of Early Adolescents." *Journal of Agricultural Education*. Spring:68-76.

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[8] Astroth, Kirk, and Haynes, George. 2002. "More than cows and cooking: Newest research shows the impact of 4-H." *Journal of Extension*. Vol. 40, #4, August 2002.

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